

I Set Before You Blessings and Curses

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 5, 2010

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

The First Commandment: You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things.

The Second Commandment: You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie or deceive by His Name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks.

The Third Commandment: Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

The Fourth Commandment: Honor your father and your mother. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents or other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.

The Fifth Commandment: You shall not murder. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.

The Sixth Commandment: You shall not commit adultery. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life and husbands and wives love and honor each other.

The Seventh Commandment: You shall not steal. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possession or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve his possessions and income.

The Eighth Commandment: You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him and explain everything in the kindest way.

The Ninth Commandment: You shall not covet your neighbor's house. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, or get in a way that only appears right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it.

The Tenth Commandment: You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not entice or force away our neighbor's wife workers or animals or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

What does God say about all of these commandments? He says, "I the Lord, your God, am a jealous God punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments." What does this mean? God threatens to punish all who break these commandments therefore we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them, but He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore we should, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands.

Do you know what I have done for you this morning? It would be easy to say that I took you on a review of the Ten Commandments from the catechism. Some of you may be afraid that I might recite the whole thing this morning. Anyone want to hear the Apostles' Creed and its meanings? Anyone hear bold enough to recite them yourselves?

Now seriously, do you understand what I have done for you this morning? I have not merely taken you on a review of the catechism. I have not merely recited the Ten Commandments for you with their meanings. It is a handy way of summarizing all of God's moral commands. No, what I have done for you this morning is place before life and death. I have placed before life and death. I have placed before you blessings and curses.

Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your strength and with all of your mind. How do you love the Lord your God? Keep His commandments. If you keep His commandments, His statutes, His judgments and His ways, then you love the Lord your God. If you do not keep His commandments, His statutes, His judgments and His ways, then you do not love the Lord your God.

And Jesus does not change this reality. I was sitting in the barber shop many years ago. The barber was talking to the guy in the chair. The barber was talking about his congregation and about Jesus. The barber wanted to know how you could tell if someone loved Jesus. The guy in the chair replied with the very words of Jesus, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. Anyone who does not keep My commandments does not love Me." There was silence in the barber shop after the guy in the chair said that as we all thought about our own lives to determine whether or not we loved Jesus. Perhaps some of us were trying to ignore what the guy in the chair said because we already knew that we did not love Jesus.

If you love the Lord your God you will have blessing and you will have life. It is as simple as that. If you turn away from the Lord your God you will have a curse and death. In telling you what the commandments of the Lord your God are, I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Now people, you will choose life and you will be joined to the Lord your God so that you will listen to what He has to say. If you don't, there is a curse.

Do you know what hell is? Sure we know what hell is. We've read the book of Revelation. We've read about the lake of fire. We have read Matthew we know that it is the fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. You would be right, but that is not all that hell is. Hell is something more. Have you read Deuteronomy where the punishment for disobeying God is worshipping other gods? The punishment for disobeying the commandments is worshipping other gods.

Whichever theologian it was who said this was brilliant and I really wish I could remember who it was, but whoever it was, they were brilliant. They said that humans are worshipping beings. Humans are worshipping beings. In other words we are going to wind up worshipping something. The question is what will we wind up worshipping. The question is not whether or not we will worship. The question is what will we worship. In other words the choice is not between worshipping and not worshipping. We are going to worship something no matter what. The choice is among the different things that we are going to worship. If we are not keeping the commandments of the Lord our God, then we are worshipping something else. That is the curse. The curse is to worship something else.

Some worship the state. They expect the state to teach them the difference between right and wrong. They expect the state to save them. The state will gladly save you and then the state will gladly teach you the difference between right and wrong only it will be the difference between right and wrong the way the state sees it. You will wind up slaving for the state.

Some people worship their parents. They expect their parents to teach them the difference between right and wrong. They expect their parents to save them from bad situations. They emulate and imitate their parents in both good ways and bad. And parents love the admiration. They'll take a little worship from their children. They will gladly teach the child right and wrong from their perspective. They will gladly save the child in exchange for the child's praise.

Satan is peculiarly crafty with what I have just said. He will tempt you. Well, isn't it the parents job to save their children? The parents job is preserve the child's safety. Isn't the parents job to teach them right from wrong? It is as long as it is God's right and God's wrong and not their own right and wrong. If parents teach their own right and wrong, they will harm their children. I have seen parents try to save their children from all kinds of things and what they wound up teaching their children was not to take responsibility for their failures. It harmed the children, but parents are so glad to be worshipped that they will save their children even when it is bad for them.

Some people worship their children. They expect their children to teach them the difference between right and wrong. They expect their children to save them. That is why they had children in the first place. They expect their child to solve their marital problems. They expect their child to introduce meaning into their lives. In this way they expect their child to teach them the difference between right and wrong and to save them. They are dependent upon their children to feel good and to perform well. The children hate it because they need Mom and Dad to be confident for them not the other way around.

Some people worship money. Money will gladly teach the difference between right and wrong. Money is a very easy teacher. Whatever promotes the acquisition and retention of wealth is good. Whatever does not promote that is bad. Stinginess suddenly becomes good unless generosity is a means to make more wealth. People expect money to save them. When things go bad, they throw money at it.

People worship their own popularity. They expect their friends to save them. Their friends charge an awful price. They will dictate what is right and what is wrong. If you want to keep your friends whom you expect to save you, then you will have to go along with their demands. If you do not go along with their demands, they will not be there to save you. The problem with bad friends is that sometimes even if you do go along with their demands, they still are not there to save you. They make lousy gods. They are unable to do the basic functions of a god.

People worship their work. They make their work the greatest good in their lives. They will sacrifice to their work because they worship it. They find their worth in doing more and more. They find their worth in accomplishment. They will sacrifice their children, their spouse, their family and whatever else is necessary to sacrifice to it in order to appease the great god of wealth.

And folks I have not touched upon addictions and substances that people worship hoping that their problems will be solved or using it to cope. I could go on and on, but you get the idea.

You are going to wind up slaving to someone. You are going to wind up sacrificing to someone. Either you will sacrifice things to money, for example, or to God. Either way. You will either sacrifice to family or to God. You will either sacrifice to work or to God. The choice is not to either sacrifice or not sacrifice. You are already making your sacrifices. The question is to whom? You are already worshipping your gods. The question is, "Who are they?"

Keep the commands of the Lord your God. Keep His statutes, His ways, His judgments and you will live. You will choose life and you will be joined with God.

The whole problem is this. God is the God who kills and makes alive. He wounds and He heals. No one can deliver out of His hand. While it may sound scary that no one can deliver out of His hand,

there is comfort in the fact that not only does God wound, He heals. Not only does God kill, He makes alive.

Jesus rose from the dead! Jesus is the God who makes alive. Jesus rose from the dead! He is the God who wounds and heals. Look at Him go around healing the sick! Jesus is the God who kills and makes alive. He waited for Lazarus to die and He raised Him from the dead. Could not the One who gave sight to the blind and made the deaf hear have kept this man from dying? The answer is, "Yes!" but He didn't. That question can be asked at your funeral. Someone could legitimately stand up at your funeral and ask, "Couldn't the One who gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, have kept this person from dying?" The answer would still be yes. But Jesus let Lazarus die. Then Jesus raised Him from the dead. Jesus may also delay coming to your rescue when you are dying and then He will raise you from the dead. He will raise you from the dead. That above all else makes Jesus your God. He kills and He makes alive.

Money cannot save you from death. Billionaires still die. Your family cannot save you from death. They may comfort you, care for you, love you, but they cannot raise you. Your friends cannot save you from death. And if you are in the wrong crowd of friends they may actually bring on your death. They can be there for you, love you, support you and all of that, but they cannot raise you. Your work cannot raise you from the dead and will the time that you have poured into work in this life really make a difference when you have done everything that you wanted to accomplish received acclaim and still die anyway. And this is to say nothing of the fact that addictive behaviors are not going to save you from death in fact almost all of them advance death. Most of them are a waste of the precious time that God has given to you.

Jesus raises the dead! Jesus will raise you from the dead! If you are going to choose a God, and you have no alternative but to choose a god, then choose Him! Be joined to Him!

And how are you joined to Jesus? It is very simple. Just listen to what He has to say.

That is why Mary was praised who sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to what He had to say. It would not be taken away from her. Martha gained good hospitality by the work that she did, but she was not joined to Jesus by it. To be joined to Jesus is to listen to what He has to say, whatever it is that He has to say. It pleases Him when you listen to Him.

That is why so much of worship orbits around listening. We listen to the Word of God from end of it to the other. That is why parents sometimes ask their disobedient children, "Are you listening to me?" or "Did you hear me?" Sometimes it's, "Do you understand me?" but most of the time it's about listening to them. Listen to Him. Be joined to Him. Listen to everything that He has to say.

Then your days will be long. Jesus is your life. When Jesus says that your days will be long He is not talking about a person living to ninety years of age or something like that as if living to ninety is somehow better than living to nineteen and then dying. When Jesus talks about your days being long He has eternity in mind. Think of it: Jesus making your days long. Think of the risen One making your days long. He makes your days long in the only way that a risen from the dead guy knows how to make days long, by raising you from the dead. Imagine tomorrow always being there.

I get to the end of my days and I am often disappointed. It is because I do not listen to Jesus or keep His commandments. I am busy worshipping something else. I get to the end of my day and I am disappointed that I did not get more done that day than I did. Even my days of leisure are often disappointments to me. I spend them doing what I want to do and I think to myself at the end of the day that I wished that I could have done more. I had more on my list of things to do. This is because I don't think that I have forever, when in reality I do. Jesus has sworn to me that He would raise me from the

dead. And here I am at the end of the day disappointed that I didn't do more as if I would not have tomorrow. That is why having Jesus as your God is so important. With Him you always have tomorrow. There is always a tomorrow. There is always time to get that other thing done. There is always time to say that necessary word. There is no disappointment with Jesus. Oh I wish I had done this or I wish I had done that. The false gods demand all of these things from us and they know that their time with us is limited and so they demand and they demand and they demand. Jesus rose from the dead. You only have to worry about today. Each day has enough trouble of its own and it might be trouble that you weren't expecting. Be prepared for your plans to change with Jesus in charge of your life. But at least with Jesus in charge when things go astray or awry, He provides the tomorrow. He lengthens your days. He is your life as He swore to you when He rose from the dead.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.